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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

17 February 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE BOARD

SUBJECT: The Current Phase in China

1. There is no doubt that the Cultural Revolutions entered a new more moderate phase around the first of February. Throughout the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution the directives and advice from Peking have contained a contradictory mix of calls for radical destructive and punitive action and calls for restraint, order, and patience. Within the past two weeks the latter emphasis appears to dominate while Mao's authority continues to be invoked, Chou En-lai, a consistent advocate of less radical policies, has emerged as the leading spokesman for the regime. The general thrust of recent developments is toward a reassertion of the authority of established organs of power - the army and the party and a clamping down on Red Guard and Red Rebel revolutionary activities.

GROUP 1

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downgrading and
declassification

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2. Late January emphasis on the Shanghai Commune as a model for "seizing power" and constructing new forms of authority dropped off suddenly in favor of the experience in Heilungkiang. Here it is stressed that the Red Rebels genuinely embodied Mao's thought by uniting with senior leading members of the provincial party committee and local PLA cadres. Peoples Daily in its commentary on this affair stresses the importance of the "three-way" combination (Red Rebels, party cadre, and the PLA) to successful revolution and makes much of the superior experience politically maturity and ability of the loyal party cadre.

3. The abrupt shift toward a more lenient attitude toward past officials has been accompanied by official criticisms of young revolutionaries. Peking broadcasts charge they are often hard to discipline and ultra-leftists and unwilling to cooperate with party officials. In Peking itself the activities of the Red Rebels and Red Guards appear to have been curtailed by the take-over of the Public Security Bureau by the Army.

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4. These manifestations are coincident with speeches and directives, some attributable to Chou calling for students and teachers to end "revolutionary interchanges" and for a halt to the movement of military personnel to engage in cultural revolutionary activities. With the scheduled re-opening of elementary schools on 13 February and high schools on 1 March a substantial proportion of the Red Guard movement will be off the streets.

5. The meaning of these developments, like much else in China over the past year, is subject to doubt. If the cultural revolution was designed primarily to serve as a cover for an effort by Mao to reassert his authority in the party, it may by now have accomplished its purpose. There has been a substantial purge of the cultural, educational, and propaganda apparatus, particularly in Peking. A number of "persons in authority taking the capitalists road" have been purged or degraded including Liu Shao-shi, Teng Shia-peng, and Peng Chen, several regional chiefs, and some important municipal figures in Peking, Shanghai, and elsewhere. Whether or not there was an actual coup plot against Mao involving the Army, as recently charged by loyalist Red Guard posters,

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an extensive purge of the military leadership has been accomplished.

6. With his principal enemies exposed and purged, Mao may now believe it is time to conciliate any remaining and misguided opposition to tidy up, to limit the disruptive effects of the cultural revolution, and turn attention to pressing domestic and foreign policy problems.

7. Alternatively, Mao's purpose in the cultural revolution may be truly radical, with the purges being incidental to the idealistic aim transforming Chinese character. If so, the present slowing down would represent a tactical retreat made necessary by fear of excessive disruptions in agricultural and industry and possibly by the strength of the opposition. In this event, however, Mao could be expected to resume the offensive after a period of consolidation. But a new radical phase could be expected sooner rather than later because Mao realizes that time is short.

8. He is probably not so deluded as to expect within his lifetime to destroy all egotistical impulses and to

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develop a totally selfless society unconcerned with material rewards and wholly committed to the greater welfare of the commune. He affirms that a continuous process of revolutionary experience extending over many years will be necessary before all remnants of capitalist and bourgeois thought and self-interest are eradicated. But he is intent on showing the way to the promised land and at this stage in his life he is unlikely to accept more than temporary and expedient shifts toward accommodation with the forces opposing his visionary society.

9. Another possibility is that through a process not readily apparent, Mao has lost his grip on power and is being boxed in by a coalition of more moderate party and military types led by Chou En-lai. We know very little of the patterns of influence and power in Peking at the moment. Lin Piao's absence has been explained as due to the flu, but his last appearance was nearly three months ago. The only visible figures who appear as firm Maoists are his wife and his old crony, Chen Po T'a. The meaning of the continued shifts and purges in the military and in the various Cultural Revolution committees over the past month or two are not clear; it could

*w/ Mao
class these
w/ the Sov
revisionists
if they were
what is
said here*

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be that the net result has been to narrow the numbers of Mao's supporters and to increase the influence of Chou En-lai, Chen Yi, and Hsiao Hua, the Director of the Army's General Political Department.

10. This explanation is probably premature but some such solution appears likely in the course of time because it would probably reflect the desires of a majority of the people who count in a power sense in China. The prospect of further or prolonged disorder is almost certainly most unattractive to a majority of the key men who have devoted their lives to building a new China - party leaders at all levels, rural cadre, senior bureaucrats, military officers, and intellectuals in all disciplines. Many of these people probably retain feelings of great admiration for Mao-Tse-tung, as the man who led and inspired China's revolution. But they must also have overwhelming doubts about this new revolution which has destroyed respected figures indiscriminately, given power to wild-eyed teenagers, threatened all material progress, and made China a ridiculous figure on the world scene. The view that Mao is mad has probably spread widely among these people. Their problem has been how to contain the Cultural Revolution without either losing their own heads or creating

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resistance on such a scale as to defeat their own purpose - a united China developing its economic and military power and playing its role as a major world power.

11. Their reluctance to bring the house down would explain, in part at least, why the resistance to Mao has nowhere in China run up a flag and proclaimed itself. Rather it has worked through existing organizations, and by infiltrating the machines of the cultural revolution; it has shown great imagination and resourcefulness in giving the appearance of loyalty while attempting to frustrate Mao's designs. It has played for time, letting the Cultural Revolution's excesses and absurdities create their own reaction while preserving Mao's doctrine for eventual enshrinement as an authority symbol. Whether these people have found their leader in Chou En-lai remains to be seen. But it is more likely that they will attempt to find this kind of a solution than to plunge openly into civil war and regional war-lordism.